

A Critical Analysis of Folk Arts of Mithila

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Folk arts by its nature is a visual commentary on or a concrete manifestation of human thoughts and thinking. The village artists in their creation have preserved the thoughts and forms of by gone ages, with all the vitality and inspiration of the consciousness that brought them into existence. Folk art, therefore, is a very precious heritage in the culture of the people of Bihar and particularly in Mithila region.

The ancient land of Bihar, consisted of main centres, namely, Vaishali, Anga, Magadha and Mithila. This Mithila region was the centre of cultural regeneration and was confined to be the seat of imposing and elegant folk art. Mithila is mainly dominated and shaped by the religious motifs, which is of universal nature. According to S. K. Roy¹ "the relation between art and religion is a universal feature. And in the religion of Brahma, art is indispensable means of communication between the devotees and Gods". The Mithila folk art can be classified into several categories. In the first category i.e. Ankita (अंकित), the folk paintings (Bhumichitra or Bhumiśobha and Bhittichitra) has got much importance. The Sanskrit word 'chitra' is generally used for painting. Many Sanskrit, Buddhist and Jain texts refer to painting (Alakhyam) as one of the prominent arts of sixty four traditional arts of India. Vatsyayana² mentions six main limbs of painting i.e. (1) knowledge of appearances; (2) correct perception, measure and structure of forms; (3) the action of feelings on forms; (4) infusion of grace, artistic representation; (5) similitudes; (6) and artistic measures of using the brush and colours. In Mithila region, the wall painting (Bhatti chitra) and floor painting (Bhumi Śobha) are very popular village art in folk women of this region. This village art is prevalent

1 The Brutas of Bengal, Introduction, p. IV.

2 कलितो ब्रह्मकले भास्वरस्य रोजसः,
सङ्गमं कलिकलमं रतिरिव रजसम् ॥

in almost all regions of Bihar with certain modifications. In Bhujpuri speaking area of Bihar, the word 'urchand' has been used for making wall painting. This is generally drawn on the outer and inner walls of houses or on the walls of Kohbara (the honeymoon room for new bride and bridegroom). But in the land of King Janaka, the folk women usually prepare paintings on three specific places of the house i. e. the Gosauni-ghara (room for kala devata), the kohbara-ghara (honeymoon room for newly married couple) and kohbara-ghara ka kantiya (corridor or out side kohbara-ghara).

From the study of Bāpa's¹ Harsha charita, we learn that in the kohbara-ghara of Grahavarma (brother-in-law of Harsha), the figure of gods were painted by the women. Bāpa² further informs us that on the gate of the inner of Vāngha (inner apartment of Grahavarma), the figure of Kāmadēva and his consort Rati and Puri were painted. Similar to the above description we also find the reference to such paintings in folk lores of Mithila and Bhujpuri regions of this state. In one Mithili³ folklore we find the description about the painting of kohbara ghara by the three wives of the King Dasarath. From one Bhujpuri folklore⁴, we learn that Sarahaja (the wife of brother-in-law) is going to paint the honeymoon room with figure of Bamban, kus leaves (locally called Puraṣa) and oxalis of auspicious signs (māṅgalika-chilua or subha). In another folklore⁵ we have a description for making figure of four birds and one pair of goose on the wall of kohbara. In Mithila region, such paintings are practised by the folk women of upper-castes (kuma-kāśāśīna), such as Brahmanas, kṛṣṇas etc. The lower caste people express their artistic sentiments and skill by utility articles. Some of them are prepared for the use in festivities of upper caste people. In Mithila region Brahmins' painting have a delicate meandering lines, which encloses areas of brilliant colours (pink, green, red, yellow, etc.).

1 Harsha-Charita, Śāntakṛtiśa Adhyāyana, p. 83.

2 Ibid. p-83.

3 Mithili-Lokagita, Song No. 14 p. 145.

4 Bhujpuri Grāmāgita, Song No. 239, p. 135.

7 यहँ बिहँ अबँ दूँ ;



Lord Gopeta in folk painting of Mithila (p. 872)



Conte: Policing of Kishida: Tardis: In drawing room (p. 17)



Well-preserved of Muhiya on the occasion of marriage : Koberghat (p. 872)



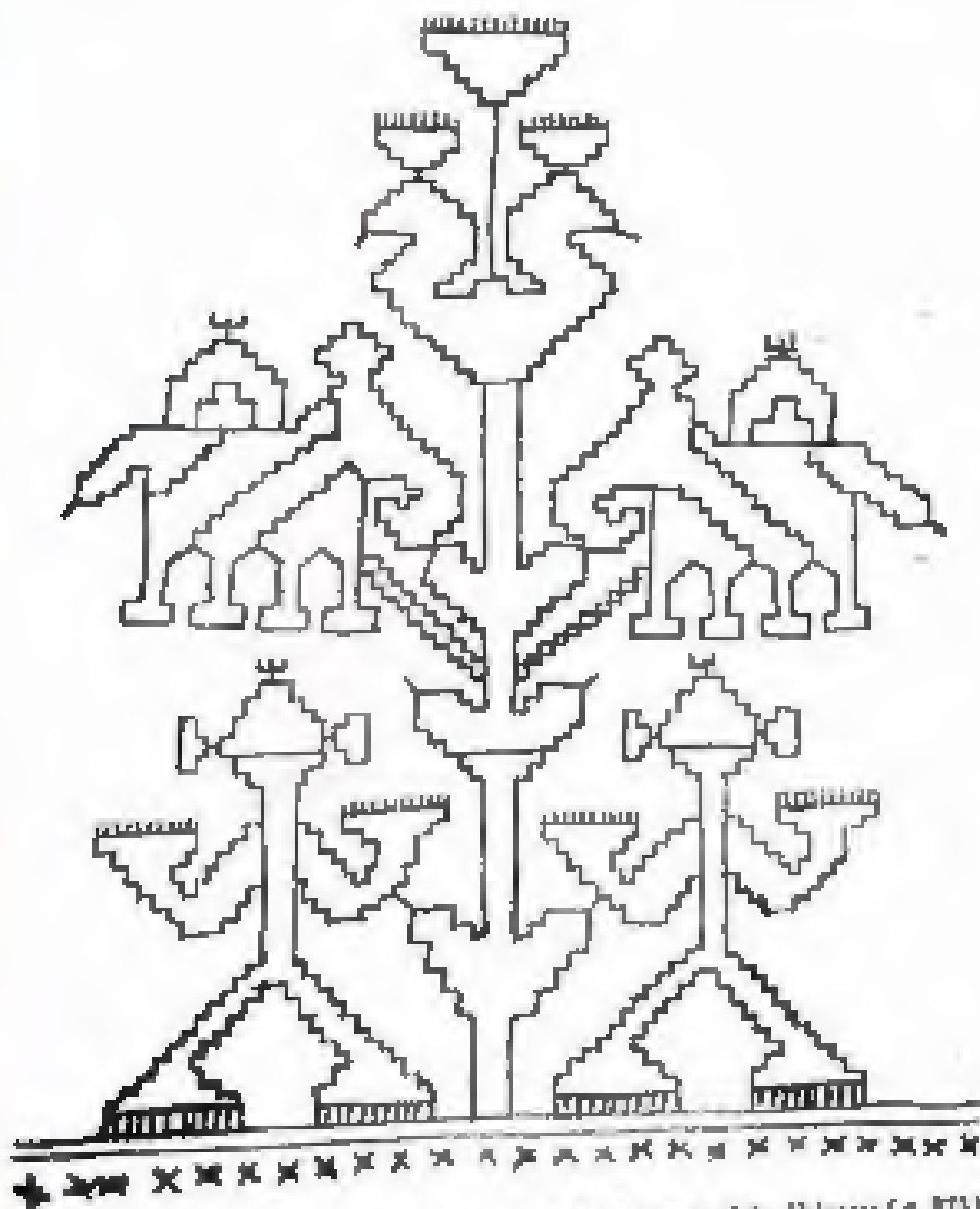
Kolt paintings of Malakula. Couple riding on elephant (p. 172)



Folk Painting of Mithila : Karna with Gopis (p. 473)



Folk Painting of Mithila : Goddess Durgā with her vibhans (p. 873)



Mithila Embroidery : Symbol of the origin and development of the Ujharee (p. 173)



Mithila Embroidery : Sufani design (p. 873)

still survives with all its old traditions. In Brahmā Purāṇa,¹⁰ the word *Urbhu*—*śobhā* and in *Naṣṭikha*—*śārin*—the word *Aripāna* is used. Hence, the word *Aripāna* is corrupt form of *Alepāna*. It is prepared on the auspicious occasions either *niṣā* party, *brahm* or at the time of different sacrifices. During festivities, the women folk of this part are in habit of drawing *Aripāna* on floor walls and courtyards with a small piece of—milk mixed in an emulsion of ground rice. The motifs of the designs are similar to the folk paintings. According to Ray¹¹ "the purpose of this *Aripāna* line drawing on the floor was originally the cultivation land fertile and fruitful by magical or sorcerous. Primitive women were inspired to draw a city in a field or *Aripāna* for their own benefit and subsistence and not merely for artistic decorations." After perusal of several *Aripāna*, I have come to this conclusion that the main purpose behind these line-drawings on the floor was just to ward off evil and do it by one because most of the *Aripāna* have the religious background. This *Aripāna* shows many different shapes and forms. The outline of *Aripāna* has got *Tur*—*tila* influence and inner features reflect the *Sakacceda*. For example, the red paint shows prohibition of *Mohini*—*gaurā* and three inner triangles reflect to *Gaur* or *Parvati*. The subjects matter of the paintings are religious, and decorative too.

The embroidery of *khichā* is an embellishment of any material cloth and designed by a needle and thread. It occupies important place in the history of Indian folk-art. *Khichā* embroidery, in a broad sense, does not imply the work of a needle and thread but it is artistically implemented ornamentation. This village of embroidery is classified into three categories i.e. *khaddi*, *applique* and *rajani*. There is a popular traditional custom in all Hindu families of this region, that after marriage of a girl on the occasion of *Phagun* in the bride has to carry the different variety of Indian embroidery along with some other articles designed by herself or by mother or grandmothers in husband's house into married house. This wedding gift—a piece of

¹⁰ Brahmā Purāṇa, 13-17.

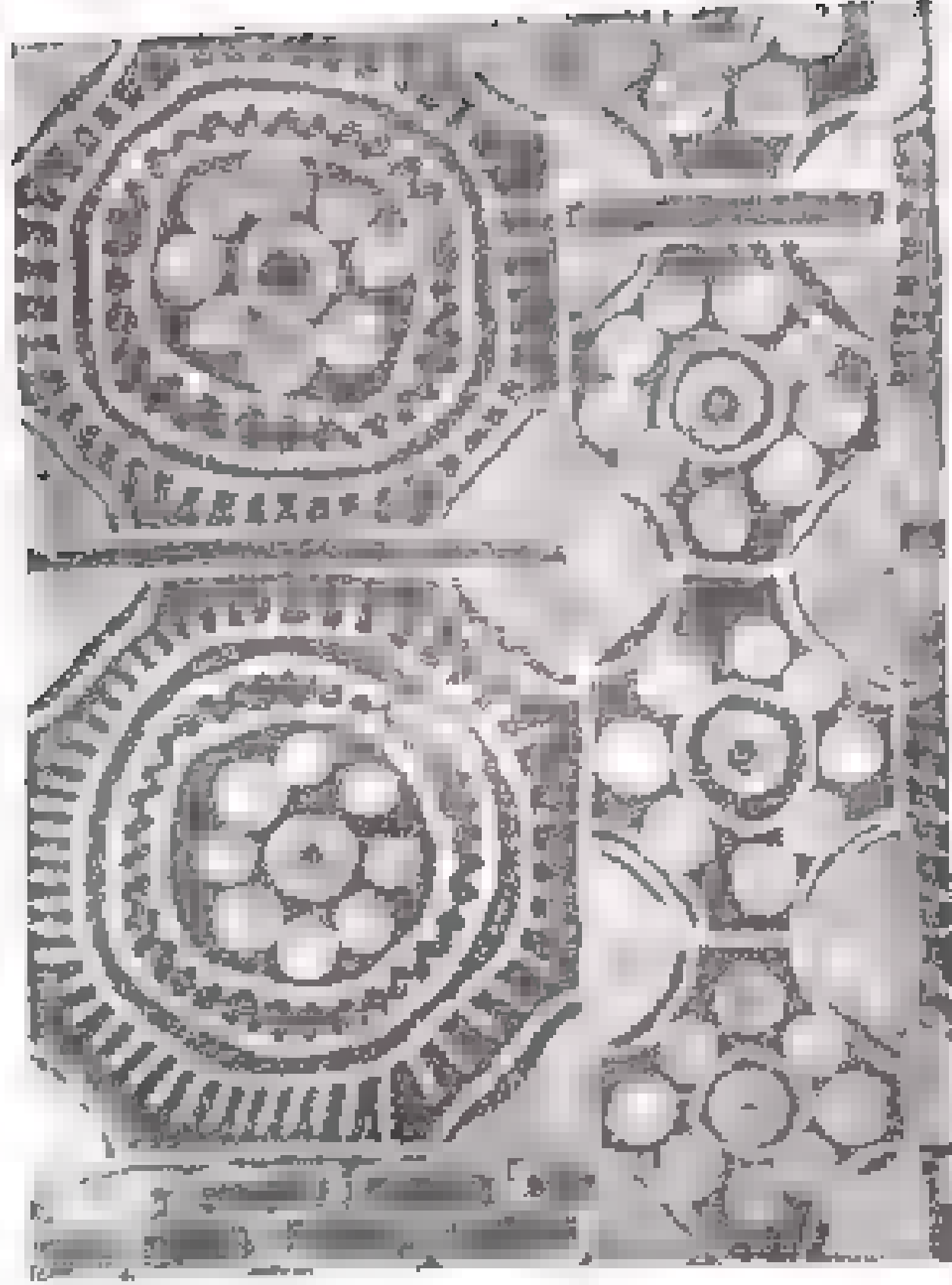
¹¹ Naṣṭikha Chandra, ch. II-26.

¹² *Vinaya of Bengal*, p. 42 and 44.

Talk art—supposed to be the side-occupation to her husband's home—is a symbolic representation of marital love, pride, care and devotion. Besides this, the women talk about their future work by adhering to the pursuit of art which signifies beauty, their wife's art and expression. In Mithila region, the village embroidery is known in three different styles or *Shikhar*, *Shikhar* and *Tagouri* varieties, characterised by a kind of chain stitch design. The word *Shikhar* is probably a corrupt form of the word "kashmir" a kind of inner-which occurs in a chain stitch. In Bishnupur area, this variety is called "Shikhar variety". *Shikhar* is another kind of folk embroidery. The folk women arrange the design on the paper or on the wall. The work is designed by horizontal, diagonal, vertical and curved lines and produces various patterns of geometrical designs. In Mithila a basket is very much similar to the Bagla and phulkari embroidery of the Punjab. The embroidery is known as "Large and variety". The word *Tagouri* indicates counting of rows. Thus, in this variety, single, double and triple design is used in vertical, horizontal and filling it by colouring the material. These Mithila folk embroidery is more or less similar to hand and machine in the work. It follows the geometrical patterns of various shapes and sizes. It is not only the geometrical designs found in this stage in the work is evidence of embroidery. In Mithila embroidery the style is horizontal, vertical and diagonal which is distinctly geometrical.

Applique work is another folk embroidery. From Assam's folk art, we know that during or after of war or at the time of building, shelter, the tent, shelter or *Pathar* with different types of brackets and patch work, were used. Similarly were the used in the way with patchwork known as applique designs. In Mithila area, this variety of applique work is called *Katwa* and *Shikhar* and *Shikhar* is known as *Katwa* variety, the cloth is cut out into different shapes and sizes and placed on the background cloth with the help of needle and thread. The designs are taken from the nature surrounding to be used as some social art of human being.

Soyani is another variety of folk art. It is made up of four threads and the process of its manufacture is very simple one. Firstly, the several threads and colour is mixed in four ways. Then after gathering the central portion, the Soyani is stitched with coloured threads. The women folk make variations

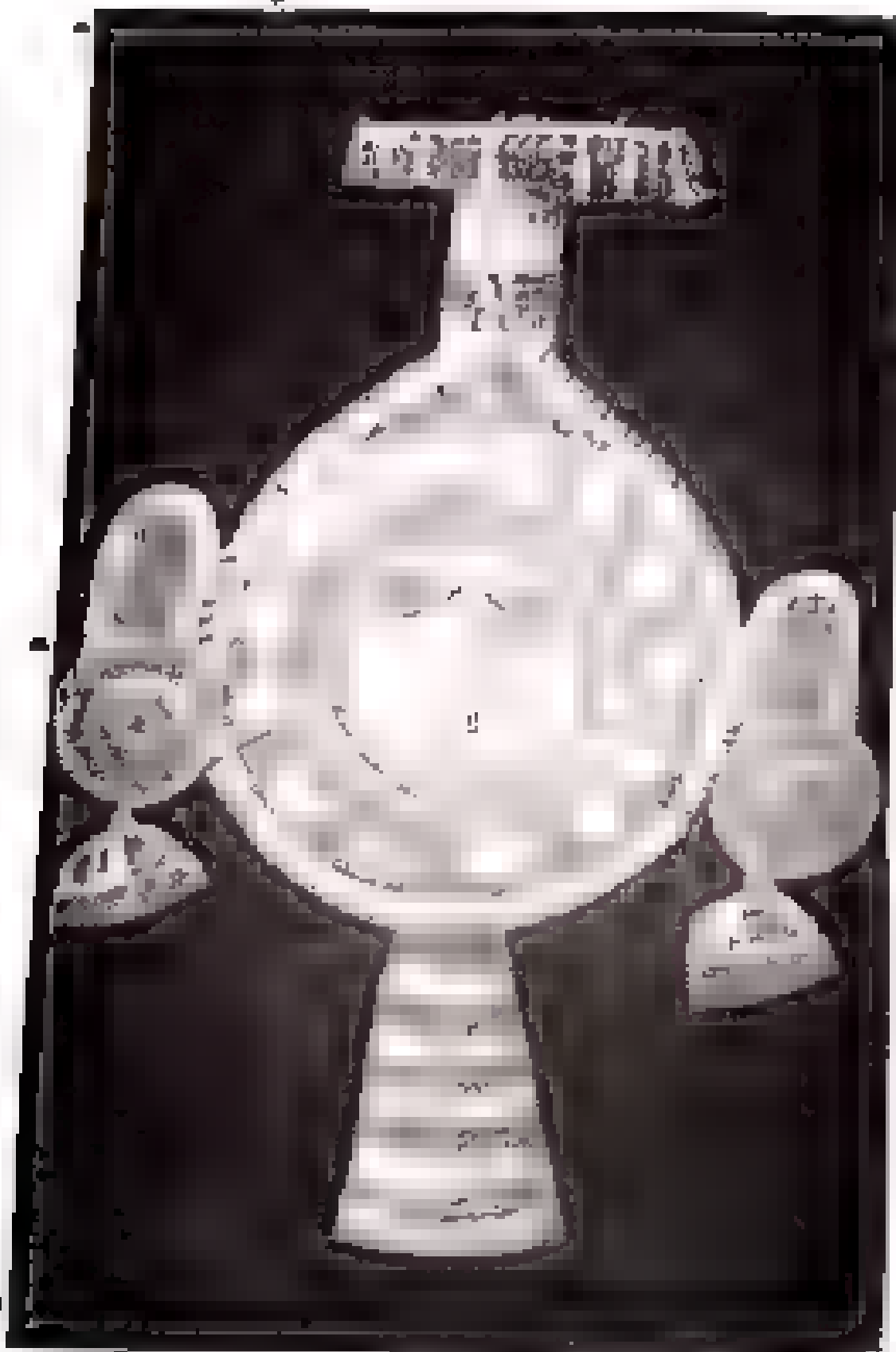




Public Examination : English (P. 174)



V. Page cap with Applique design (p. 176)



Silhouette of MinbDa Symbolic figure of the Sun god (plate)



Shikhar of Shikhar, Temple design (p. 577)



Silkworms in Mith. A. Clanger. (P. 177)



Sketches of Mithila Pinnacles or Pinnacles (p. 277)

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Spores of Asplenium (Asplenium sp. B. 7)

of Mehadi in feet and palms; Mahavara in feet, and Gaudan (tattooing) in hands, legs, forehead etc.

From Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*, we know that doll making was a popular folk art of Hindu society. He has referred to the word 'vaidhapatya' for doll making art. It is very difficult to determine the origin of the doll making. The doll is usually understood to be a miniature of human figure representing a phase of life or character. It is mainly an object for children's play specially for those who are not even ten aged. The main purpose of this doll making is just to give the growing child (male or female) a means to develop his racial consciousness inherent in his national or domestic traditions. In every village of Bihar and particularly in Mithila the folk women usually prepare the dolls for both the sexes. The process of doll making is very simple one. Only torn cloth and Blundi (husk) are used to make dolls. In Mithila area, the dolls are made by the folk-women, are much artistic than the dolls of Bhojpur area. The Mithili doll is called "Pardhan Gaudya". The anatomical features are to some extent proportionate and dresses are generally dhoti, kurta, bagabandi (or mirzayi) for male, and sari and blouses for female dolls. Generally, during the occasion of *chudagan* (wedding-marriage) of the girl, these domestic dolls are sent to the bridegroom's house as token of gift for the children of that family. Hence, it was the practice in Mithila region that young maidens have to learn this art from their mother and grandmother. Thus, the doll accelerated the healthy growth of child's mental faculty as it comes in direct contact with the miniature of the realises of nature and it developed in children the sense of art, harmony, colour sense, and beauty of form.

In ancient days, the beautifying of a person was considered to be an art. Subtle sense was explored and cultivated to respond to the ingenious device of paint, perfume and jewels. Mehadi (or Hena) had been known to Arab world since the most ancient times. The mummies of Egyptian kings showed the royal toe-nail dyed with deep ground red Hena. But in Mithila area, the application of mehadi established its place as the aid to erotic beauty of women. In the paintings of Rajasthan, Mughal and Kangra schools, Mehadi is seen as decorating the hands and feet of the women. The prominent features

of Mehadi is its property of imparting cool to the body. The dark green leaves are plucked, washed and grounded to the thick paste with water. This paste applied by straw needle which is always cold and its odour resembles strangely, the aroma of wet earth. The folk women prepare several designs on the palm of the ladies, such as, creeper, flowers, chakra and other flora and fauna, symbolic representation to human figurine, geometrical shapes etc.

Like mehadi, the application of mahāvāra is often used in higher society of Mithilā. Even the folk women of lower strata used it on auspicious occasions like marriage ceremony, *śivātsa* or on the other festive occasions. In Bhujpuri speaking area of Bihar, the application of mahāvāra or *āitā* is called "godā-Bharand" (decoration of feet). In Sanskrit literature the word "ālak-taka" has been used for mahāvāra. In ancient days the application of mahāvāra was very essential for court dancers or the dancers of the temple, and the prostitute. The ladies of the village generally applied this mahāvāra on the upper portion or side of the feet. Usually the designs are of creepers, small flowers, swastika and some other geometrical designs.

The tattooing or *godāvat* folk art is very ancient one. In older days *godāvat* was one of the major means to decorate the body and to make the physical structure attractive one. In different regions of Bihar and particularly in Mithilā, after marriage of young brides, the tattooing is considered to be an essential thing because it is a symbol or insignia of *saukhāgya*. The persons who are engaged in tattooing work, made different and diverse designs by the help of thin needle and colour. Firstly, they made the needle in black colour (prepared with the mixture of milk and dhaniā fruit) and then they pinched it in a particular place in the body of village girls and gradually they made the designs. Really it was a very painful process. The designs are generally of geometrical shapes (square, circle, vinda etc.) flowers, creepers, small birds etc. With the progress of civilisation the tattooing is in the way of declining stage, but the writing of the name in the hands is still in practice in Bihar.

Thus, the Mithilī folk artists have certain distinct characteristics of their work. They reveal the creative urge of the folk community and disclose their

aesthetic sense. These village arts have embodied the accumulated experiences handed down traditionally from mother to daughter and from daughter to grand-daughters. These traditional arts perfectly reveal our ancient concept of "Satyameva-Śivam-Sundaram". They are precious legacy and valuable part of our cultural heritage. Thanks to the Government of Bihar, where every possible effort is being taken to recollect and preserve the specimens of Mithili heritage in 'Crafts Museum' of Patna (Bihar).

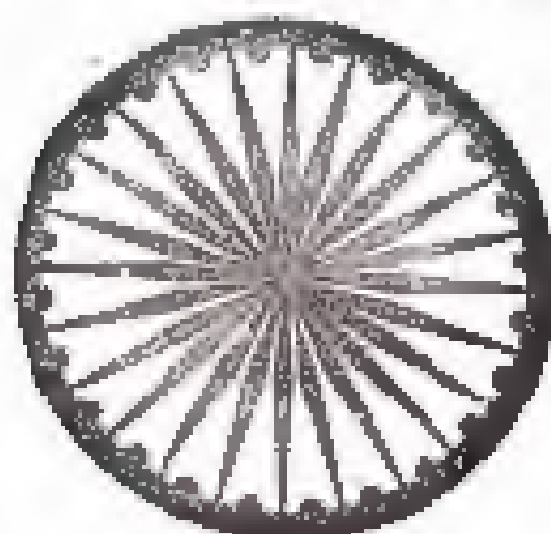
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